



# Software Diversification for WebAssembly

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Doctoral Thesis in Computer Science  
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## Abstract

WebAssembly has become the fourth officially recognized web language, allowing web browsers to adapt native applications for Web. Moreover, WebAssembly has developed into a critical component of backend scenarios such as edge computing and cloud computing. Nowadays, WebAssembly is used in a wide range of applications, including web browsers, blockchain, and cloud computing. While security was a primary focus in its design, WebAssembly remains vulnerable to attacks, including side-channels and memory corruption. In addition, WebAssembly has been exploited to transport malware, especially in instances of browser cryptojacking. Remarkably, the predictability of the WebAssembly ecosystem, including its users and the programs it hosts, is exceedingly high. This predictability can exacerbate the impact of a vulnerability within these ecosystems. For example, a flaw in a web browser, instigated by a faulty WebAssembly program, could potentially affect millions of users.

This thesis aims to enhance the security of the WebAssembly ecosystem through the introduction of methods and tools for Software Diversification. Software Diversification is a strategy designed to augment the cost of exploitation by rendering the software less predictable. By automatically generating numerous variants of a program, we can decrease predictability within ecosystems. These variants harden observable properties typically utilized to carry out attacks. For instance, we can generate variants of a program with diverse memory layouts and control-flow graphs, thereby strengthening code analysis, execution traces, and execution times. Yet, in the context of WebAssembly, Software Diversification has not been explored.

We present three pioneering tools to the community: CROW, MEWE, and WASM-MUTATE. Each tool is specifically designed to address a unique aspect of Software Diversification. Moreover, these tools synergistically enhance each other. We furnish empirical evidence that Software Diversification is applicable to WebAssembly programs in two distinct manners: Offensive and Defensive Software Diversification. Our investigation into Offensive Software Diversification in WebAssembly reveals potential avenues for improving the detection of WebAssembly malware. In contrast, our experiments in Defensive Software Diversification demonstrate that WebAssembly programs can be strengthened against side-channel attacks, specifically against the Spectre attack.

**Keywords:** WebAssembly, Software Diversification, Side-Channels, Moving Target Defense

## Sammanfattning

# LIST OF PAPERS

1. ***WebAssembly Diversification for Malware Evasion***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Tim Toady, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Computers & Security, Volume 131, 2023, 17 pages*  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167404823002067>
2. ***Wasm-mutate: Fast and Effective Binary Diversification for WebAssembly***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Nicholas Fitzgerald, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Submitted to Computers & Security, under revision, 17 pages*  
<https://arxiv.org/pdf/2309.07638.pdf>
3. ***Multi-Variant Execution at the Edge***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Pierre Laperdrix, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*Moving Target Defense (MTD 2022), 12 pages*  
<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3560828.3564007>
4. ***CROW: Code Diversification for WebAssembly***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Orestis Floros, Oscar Vera-Pérez, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus  
*Measurements, Attacks, and Defenses for the Web (MADWeb 2021), 12 pages*  
<https://doi.org/10.14722/madweb.2021.23004>
5. ***Superoptimization of WebAssembly Bytecode***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Shrinish Donde, Jian Gu, Orestis Floros, Lucas Satabin, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus  
*Conference Companion of the 4th International Conference on Art, Science, and Engineering of Programming (Programming 2021), MoreVMs, 4 pages*  
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3397537.3397567>
6. ***Scalable Comparison of JavaScript V8 Bytecode Traces***  
**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry  
*11th ACM SIGPLAN International Workshop on Virtual Machines and Intermediate Languages (SPLASH 2019), 10 pages*  
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